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## Decrease in Nuttall Sparrow Population in Golden Gate Park

By JOSEPH MAILLIARD

For several years past I have been more or less observant of local flocks, colonies, or whatever one prefers to call them, of the Nuttall Sparrow in Golden Gate Park, San Francisco, and have been particularly interested in three distinct groups that have their habitat immediately around the buildings of the California Academy of Science (including the Steinhart Aquarium). Within the last two years these three colonies have been fairly well adorned with Biological Survey bracelets, as regards their individual members, which help greatly to keep track of movements of these birds even when they are not repeatedly caught for checking up their band numbers, as no banded birds are found outside of a very small radius from the Academy doors, except possibly in the nesting season.

While the individuals composing these groups separate and scatter during the nesting season, they have, for several years at least, gathered again with the waning of summer, each flock on its own territory as shown by the records of the banded birds that are recaptured.

One of these flocks is established right opposite the main entrance to the Academy building, where it is often seen feeding on the small lawn in front of the steps. This group moves around but little, going at times just across the driveway north of the building into the low bushes that border the drive, and at other times across the seal court into the cedars and bushes there, in which it probably passes the nights; but it does not seem to stray more than a couple of hundred feet away from the Academy entrance. A second colony has its abode a few yards back of the Aquarium, with some heavy vines and bushes for its nightly shelter, while the third group occupies the locality that has recently been transformed into a Shakespearean Garden, apparently a transformation not greatly to the birds' fancy (see Mailliard, Condor, XXXI, p. 192).

Since January, 1928, about 250 Nuttall Sparrows have been banded in Golden Gate Park, most of which were members of these three colonies, but included some that must have been migrants that had temporarily joined, for many of these were not heard from again. Unfortunately it is practically impossible to do any banding between early spring and the fall, as the sparrows begin to neglect cereal food some weeks before nesting time and maintain a very decided preference for insects as food for themselves and young until the latter are able to secure their own food. Also, in the nesting season the birds scatter to such an extent as to make attempts at banding them impossible in such a place as a public park.

The Nuttall Sparrows have usually begun gathering in their old haunts early in September, in such numbers as to make it worth while to commence banding. This year (1929), however, the number of individuals in the colonies was so small that banding work was not at all profitable. For instance, after the ground had been baited for a day or two, six traps were set out on September 18th, when only eight birds were taken, and kept set on the next day, when only six captures were made. As the flocks did not seem to increase, no further efforts were made until October 17th, when three only were taken, with one capture the next morning, when trapping was again discontinued for want of customers. It is true that a few "returns" were recorded of birds banded in the previous fall or winter, but not enough of even these important

captures were made to be worth the time and trouble spent upon the trapping work.

As Nuttall Sparrows were so scarce near the Academy, I went further afield to note the status of other colonies in the park and to find out if there were any local changes in the habitats of well-known Nuttall communities. A study of the ground between the Academy and the Haight Street entrance to the park clearly showed that but few of these sparrows were present in any of their formerly well-populated gathering grounds. Only twenty-five or thirty individuals were seen on this walk, while five times that number would easily have been seen on the same date last year. Other parts of the park have shown the same scarcity, some of the usual gathering grounds being entirely deserted, as proved on November 9th, upon one of my monthly rounds of the principal lakes of the park, when I walked from the Academy as far as Middle Lake, counting the number of ducks and coots along this route.

One of the surprises of this recent banding work in the park is the extremely small number of "returns" that are showing up in the traps, as only fifteen of these have been recorded this fall. Either the mortality must have been deplorably great among the park sparrows or they have left for parts unknown.

Meanwhile, besides the ever-present cats, the rat and (introduced) fox squirrel populations have increased rapidly in the park—three ever-hungry enemies of our bird friends. Readers of "The Gull," in which the census of birds' nests found in the Music Concourse in the park has appeared annually for the past ten years, will notice that the number of nests found last year was the lowest of the diminishing counts and that only eight nests showed evidence of having contained a brood of young. It looks as if we could not expect to see many birds in the park if the squirrels and rats keep on increasing at the present rate.



### Annual Census of Water Fowl at Lake Merritt, Oakland, California

The annual count of the wild fowl at Lake Merritt was taken this year on January 12th, from 1:45 to 3:45 o'clock, with the following result:

Canvas-back .....	1,701	Bonaparte Gull .....	63
Pintail .....	453	California Gull .....	59
Baldpate .....	355	Glaucous-winged Gull .....	10
Mallard .....	64	Ring-billed Gull .....	4
Ruddy .....	55	Herring Gull .....	4
American Golden-eye .....	17	Coot .....	326
Buffle-head .....	14	Eared Grebe .....	38
Scaup .....	14	Pied-billed Grebe .....	11
Shoveler .....	6	Western Grebe .....	6
Green-winged Teal .....	2	Horned Grebe .....	4
European Widgeon .....	1	Farallon Cormorant .....	1
Red-head .....	1		
Total.....	2,683	Total.....	526

Among the ducks, the greatest increase was noted among the Canvas-backs, followed by the Mallards. The greatest decrease was noted among the Scaup, followed by the Ruddy Ducks, then the Buffle-heads.

Observers: Mr. and Mrs. Stephens, Mrs. Cummings, Misses Cockefair, Bernice Kautz, Beryl Kautz, Rinehart, Dr. Card, Messrs. Bryant, Lockerbie.



**Sharp-shinned Hawk and Varied Thrush:** Late one night about the middle of November, a dweller on the top of Russian Hill was aroused by a thud and the noise of something falling. There was no cry. The next morning a few streaks of blood on the plate glass window attracted attention to the bodies of two birds below the sill; a Sharp-shinned Hawk, *Accipiter velox* (Wilson), and a Coast Varied Thrush, *Ixoreus naevius naevius* (Gmelin). Cornelia C. Pringle, December 30th, 1929.

**Audubon Brings \$6,500.** John James Audubon's monumental work, "Birds of America," containing 435 colored plates of birds in life size, was sold at Sotheby's to Gabriel Wells for \$6,500. The huge volume, about 3 feet by 2 feet, was completed in 1838. From "Art Digest," January 1st, 1930.



### Audubon Notes

**February Meeting** will be held on Thursday evening, the 13th, at 8 o'clock, Room 19, 2nd Floor, Ferry Building.

The speaker of the evening will be Mr. Vaughan McCaughey, Editor of the "Sierra Educational News," whose subject will be "Adventures with Birds in Three Lands." His talk will treat of his boyhood experiences in the Middle West, with his studies of Hawaiian Birds, and will conclude with his knowledge of California Bird Life.



**February Field Trip** will be taken to Easton on Sunday, the 16th. The party will form at the corner of Fifth and Market Streets, San Francisco, to take motor bus leaving there about 8:55 A. M. East Bay members should reach Ferry Building not later than 8:20 and take car up Market to Fifth Street. Bring luncheon and canteens filled, as there is no drinking water at luncheon place. Leave bus at Easton Drive. Walk to top of ridge for luncheon, to San Andreas Lake and back to highway at Uncle Tom's Cabin, about nine miles. Return by bus or trolley. Bus fare, 25 cents each way. Chas. A. Bryant, Leader.



Owing to the lack of space, the Christmas Bird Census and the Outing Report for 1929 will be published later.



**January Meeting:** The thirteenth annual meeting was held January 9th, in Room 19, Ferry Building, with thirty-one present. President C. A. Harwell, presiding.

Announcement of the following books was made: The Pacific Coast Avifauna No. 19, "Birds of Portland Area," obtainable from the Cooper Club at \$1.00 per copy.

"Birds of the Pacific States," by Hoffman, may be obtained from Mr. Harwell at the publisher's price, \$4.00. Stock limited.

Annual reports were read by the President, Treasurer and Outing Chairman.

Mr. Harwell reported upon the State Bird Campaign, stating that the Valley Quail had received the highest number of votes, and asked that this information be widely disseminated. Dr. D'Evelyn agreed to see that notices to this effect were sent to the San Francisco Schools. Miss Werner agreed to write an article on this subject for the "Sierra Educational News."

Miss Werner brought to the attention of our members that Bud Vierra, a San Francisco boy, had been wounded while attempting to save a Gull that had been shot by other boys. It was agreed that a resolution be sent Bud Vierra commending him for his humane act.

Officers and Directors for 1930 were elected as follows:

Dr. F. W. D'Evelyn.....	Honorary Pres.
Brighton C. Cain.....	President
Herman de Fremery.....	1st Vice-Pres.
Miss Cornelia Pringle....	2nd Vice-Pres.
Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....	Treasurer
C. B. Lastreto.....	Corresponding Secy.
Mrs. Bessie Kibbe.....	Recording Secy.
F. M. Jencks.....	Director
C. W. Lockerbie.....	Director
Chas. A. Bryant.....	Director

Field observations were made as follows:

Mr. Bryant: December 29th, Phoenix Lake, Wood Duck; January 5th, near Benicia, six White-tailed Kites.

Mrs. Stephens: December 14th, Stow Lake, a male Green-winged Teal.

Mr. Lockerbie: December 25th, Legion of Honor, Burrowing Owl, making the third successive year for this record; January 1st, Ross Station, Cabanis Woodpecker; January 5th, Hunter's Point, San Francisco, Rufous-crowned Sparrow.

Mr. de Fremery reported his observations on January 9th, of the action of a flock of Valley Quail in the presence of a Sharp-shinned Hawk.

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Mrs. Bracelin: January 6th, University of California campus, Red-breasted Sapsucker.

Mr. Cain: December 14th, Boy Scouts' Camp, Oakland, Red-breasted Sapsucker; January 5th, Lake Merritt, Greater and Lesser Scaup.

Mr. Harwell: December 5th to 10th, Merced River below Pohono Bridge, Yosemite, Pacific Loon.

The speaker of the evening, Dr. Harold C. Bryant told of his visits with some Eastern Ornithologists and something of their institutions.

Directors' Meeting followed. Percy Bidinger, Inverness, elected to membership.

C. A. Bryant was appointed Chairman of the Outing Committee for 1930.

Mrs. Stephens was appointed Editor of "The Gull."

The following motion was passed: "That the uniform practice of capitalizing all bird species names in 'The Gull' be adopted."

On motion of Miss Pringle, seconded by Mr. de Fremery, a vote of thanks was extended to Mr. Harwell, the retiring President, for his generosity in service and personal expenses incurred in connection with the State Bird Campaign.

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**January Field Trip** was taken on Sunday, the 12th, to Lake Merritt, Oakland. The day was cold and calm, with sunshine and showers.

The trip was made primarily to study the wild water fowl, chiefly ducks, which winter here. Great disappointment was had upon our arrival at the feeding station; instead of the ducks which usually greet us, only domestic pigeons were present. The construction of banding pens and illegal shooting by miscreants had temporarily frightened the ducks so that only a few venture out on the shore near

the feeding station. Most of them stay on the water or on and near the artificial island. However, thirteen species were again represented.

Of the land birds observed in the park adjacent to the lake, three of the species observed last year were missing. Great excitement was caused by the presence of a flicker having bright yellow coloration instead of the red which our native flicker displays.

Birds observed were: Horned, American Eared, Western and Pied-billed Grebes; American White Pelican; Farallon Double-crested Cormorant; Hutchins, Cackling Canada, Common White-fronted and Lesser Snow Geese; Common Mallard, European Widgeon, Baldpate, American Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Shoveller, Red-head, Canvas-back, Greater and Lesser Scaup, American Golden-eye, Buffle-head and Ruddy Ducks; Coast California Quail; American Coot; Glaucous-winged, American Herring, California, Ring-billed and Bonaparte Gulls; Anna Hummingbird; Monterey Red-shafted Flicker; Northwestern California Jay; California Plain Titmouse; Pacific Coast Bush-tit; Intermediate Wren-tit; Western Robin; Western Ruby-crowned Kinglet; American Pipit; Cedar Waxwing; Pacific Audubon Warbler; California Brewer Blackbird; English House Sparrow; California Linnet; Golden-, Nuttall White-crowned and Santa Cruz Song Sparrows.

On the Bay: White-winged and Surf Scoters; Northern Western Gull. Fifty species.

Members in attendance: Mr. and Mrs. Lockerbie; Mr. and Mrs. Stephens; Misses Berg, Cockefair, Kautz, Rinehart; Dr. Card; Messrs. Bryant, Jencks. Guests: Mrs. Cummings, Misses Bernice Kautz, Powell. Eleven members, three guests. C. A. Bryant, Leader and Historian.

### Audubon Association of the Pacific For the Study and Protection of Birds

President.....	Brighton C. Cain.....	221 Thayer Bldg., Oakland
Recording Secretary.....	Mrs. Bessie W. Kibbe.....	Room 510, Russ Bldg., San Francisco
Corresponding Secretary.....	C. B. Lastreto.....	260 California St., San Francisco
Treasurer.....	Mrs. A. B. Stephens.....	1695 Filbert St., San Francisco

Monthly meeting second Thursday, 8 P. M., Room 19, Ferry Building.

Address Bulletin correspondence to Mrs. A. B. Stephens, 1695 Filbert St., San Francisco.  
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Members are responsible for dues until written notice of resignation is received by Treasurer.